

Folsom helps break stalling tactics in Alabama Senate

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MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Democratic Lt. Gov. Jim Folsom Jr. ignored the shouts of Republican senators Tuesday and helped break through GOP stalling tactics that had threatened passage of the state budgets.

With Folsom's help, the Senate's Democratic majority quickly killed two bills that the minority coalition of senators had been holding up and then took the procedural steps needed to put the state budgets and public employees' pay raises in line for passage in the closing days of the legislative session.

"This is an illegal vote. You cannot violate the law," Sen. Larry Dixon, R-Montgomery, shouted at Folsom.

Folsom said he was making sure the Legislature abided by its constitutional duty to pass the state budgets each year. "It is the paramount duty of the body to pass budgets. The people of Alabama are watching," he said.

Since shortly after the legislative session began March 6, the Senate's minority of 12 Republican senators and five dissident Democrats has been delaying action to protest Senate operating rules and committee appointments they say reduce the minority's influence and to protest their lack of input in shaping the state budgets. The majority of 18 Democrats said the minority and Republican Gov. Bob Riley were upset they lost the Senate's organizational battle by one vote.

In recent weeks, the minority's stalling tactics had involved keeping the Senate from voting on two routine bills to extend the life of two state regulatory boards: the Alabama Board of Examiners of Landscape Architects and the State Board of Licensure for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors.

When the Senate convened Tuesday, the Senate's 18-member Democratic majority voted 18-17 to kill both bills that had been used for stalling.

The votes came as several Republicans shouted for points of order. Folsom ignored their shouts in taking votes to kill the two bills.

Then working with the Senate's Democratic leadership, Folsom took the procedural steps necessary for the Senate to receive the state General Fund budget and education budget that were previously passed by the House. The Senate also received House-passed legislation to provide a 7 percent raise to education employees and 3.5 percent raise to state workers beginning Oct. 1.

Those bills now go to Senate committees with only four meeting days remaining in the session.

While Republicans heaped criticism on Folsom, the Senate's longest-serving member, Bobby Denton, D-Muscle Shoals, praised the lieutenant governor for ending "something that has been a cancer on this institution since it began."

Active and retired education employees who filled the Senate's gallery gave Folsom a round of applause.

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